J.W. Thirtle, "A Sabbatarian Pioneer - Dr. Peter Chamberlain. II. Critical Appreciation," Transactions of the Baptist Historical Society 2.2 (October 1911): 110-117.

A Sabbatarian Pioneer—Dr. Peter Chamberlen.

II.—CRITICAL APPRECIATION.

Our observations on the story thus outlined must be few; but in any case they will be controlled by some acquaintance with the history of the times in which Dr. Chamberlen lived. It is, of course, impossible to do justice to a public man living in the seventeenth century if at the outset we bring his conduct to the ethical standards of the twentieth century.

The Midwifery Forceps.

In the first place, as to the midwifery forceps. A writer in the "Dictionary of National Biography" censures the Doctor for having used secret processes in his work as a physician, and thus indulges in a criticism that is essentially unfair. On this point, Dr. Aveling speaks with judgment:—

> At that time the possession of a nostrum was not looked upon as degrading or derogatory to its owner; and the custom of not publishing secret modes of practice was very common. Only a little more than a hundred years since, Smellie writes, "I have heard a gentleman of eminence in one of the branches of medicine affirm that he never knew one person of our profession who did not pretend to be in possession of some secret or another." When the forceps was invented, the age delighted in mystery. . . . All that can be fairly said against the Chamberlens is, that they were no better than their neighbours; and that they failed to recognise the obligation imposed upon all members of our noble profession of publishing freely and immediately any new method of alleviating human suffering, which, by their industry or genius, they may have been able to discover.

Precisely so; living in the seventeenth century, Dr. Peter was of the Puritan period, and shared its limitations on the one hand, its strength of purpose on the other. In some respects he was

ahead of his time—in political, social, and religious proposals; but in other respects he was not one whit above his more ordinary contemporaries.

It is evident that the Chamberlen family endeavoured all along to improve the instruments to which they owed so much of their professional fame. As to the subject of our sketch, he did not pretend to be the inventor of the forceps, but claimed to be an expert practitioner of midwifery. On the entire evidence, Dr. Aveling has arrived at the conclusion that Peter the Elder was the inventor, and that from him the instruments passed from hand to hand in the family. That particular Peter, born in France, came to England with his father, as we have seen, like other Huguenot refugees. In the words of Dr. Aveling, he "rewarded our country for its shelter, by bestowing upon us the priceless and beneficent bounty of his skill and genius."

In this connection it may be added, that our Peter, the Sabbatarian champion, brought up his sons Hugh and Paul in his own profession, and that they both achieved a material prosperity, though not being heard of in the world of religious disputation or conviction.

Immunity from Persecution.

Though from time to time subjected to annoyance, and molested in various ways, Dr. Chamberlen was not persecuted in the sense experienced by many of his neighbours and friends in the Nonconformist pastorate. One reason for this may assuredly be found in the fact that he was a man of social distinction and influence. Another such case, in the same period, at once occurs to mind: William Kiffin (1616-1701) a wealthy London merchant, was pastor of the church in Devonshire Square. Both came from the Independent body into that of the Baptists; and it would appear that there was an assistant pastor (possibly more than one) in each case. As is well known, King Charles II. showed a certain friendship with Kiffin. Why should not the immunity from persecution enjoyed by Chamberlen be put down to a similar tolerating purpose on the part of the King? If the wealth of Kiffin secured him from trouble such as others had to endure, though not from molestation, why may not the social position and influence of Chamberlen have secured him from the greater hardships that were visited upon many Nonconformists in his day?

Though not a quiet man—he spoke and wrote his mind without fear—Dr. Chamberlen was nevertheless let alone while others, again and again, had to hide and flee. His neighbours

Henry Jessey and Hanserd Knollys were in continual danger of losing life and liberty: moreover, they suffered bonds and imprisonment, while Dr. Peter's brother in Sabbatarian faith and testimony, Francis Bampfield, also had a like experience. How came it to pass, in such circumstances, that Peter retained his freedom? Though finding some measure of explanation in his social position and wealth, yet there were other contributory reasons for his being so much let alone. Assuredly one was that his surgical skill made him a person to be considered. As Charles IX. of France, by a selfish partiality, spared his Protestant physician, the celebrated Ambroise Paré from the fate of the thousands of Huguenots on the occasion of the St. Bartholomew Massacre, so was it, again and again, in the times of the Stuarts in England. Accordingly, the militant Puritanism of Dr. Peter Chamberlen was winked at by those in authority in the days of Charles II. The Court that had refused the Doctor to the Russian Czar, retained him in its own interests, in spite of peculiarities which, however annoying, did not disqualify him from the exercise of his surgical skill.

Physician and Astrologer.

We must likewise consider what sort of a physician this man was. Beyond question he was a "Philomath," one who combined astrology with medicine.[14] He took his degree at Padua, where Judiciary Astrology was a prominent subject of study; he passed much time in the Low Countries, where it was also taught as advanced science; in a word, he flourished in a time when, as we know, all the sciences, all religion, and all politics, were permeated with astrological theories.[15] Those were the days of the almanac-makers, whose productions were spelled over in the taverns and quoted in the Senate; whose predictions, moreover, nerved the arm of the soldier and rounded the periods of the orator. It has, in fact, been said, and with substantial truth, in regard to certain continental kings, that "they engaged astrologers to fight their battles"; and even in England, William Lilly, a contemporary of Dr. Peter, was examined before a Committee of the House of Commons as to the cause of the great fire of London, and examined as an astrologer.

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[14] In view of this, one is able to appreciate the feeling of his enemy when he adopted the pseudonym of "Philolethes," as already mentioned in the text (p. 24).

[15] "Encyclopaedia Britannica," s.v. Astrology.

In the days of which we write, "no physician was considered accomplished in his art who knew nothing of astrology.[16] That Dr. Chamberlen was accomplished, is not a point for discussion, for his high standing was universally allowed; and it was because he was so completely qualified, as the age understood it, that the King refused him to the Czar. It is worthy of note in this connection that, in his pamphlet "The Sober Man's Vindication," when speaking of the Plague, the Doctor says, in parenthesis, that it was "menaced by astrologers." Herein he speaks as one in sympathy with them, not in a spirit of cavilling or criticism. In fact, at that time, and later also, the potion was administered, the leech was applied, and all else was done, with the horoscope of the patient continually in view. Hence, if we would appreciate the circumstances, we must consider Dr. Chamberlen as one who, through "reading the nativities" of his patients, was reputed to be able to act at the times most favourable to happy issues and successful results. Therefore, with their own interests ever in view, kings and rulers who believed such powers to be at a man's command, might well show indulgence in regard to matters which to them meant little more than prejudice and superstition.[17]

We have already seen that in the seventeenth century the Bishops granted licences to midwives. It is likewise important to remember that they issued licences for the practice of physic; and, as showing the extent to which astrology was recognised as a "hand-maid" or associate of medicine, it is interesting to note that, in 1670, the Archbishop of Canterbury (Sheldon), by request of Elias Ashmole, who was an acknowledged devotee of astrology, granted a licence to practise physic to William Lilly (just mentioned), who for upwards of twenty-five years had been notorious as an astrologer and almanac-maker, and in the meantime had been the subject of gossip, among high and low alike, as compiler of the "nativities" of celebrities in Church and State.

Thus we conclude that, during the reign of Charles II., when he was most active in his dissenting propaganda, Dr. Peter

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[16] Dr. Aveling—"The Chamberlens and the Midwifery Forceps." Preface.

[17] As is well known, Charles I. consulted the astrologers, and timed his political action upon the advice which he received from them. Cromwell, moreover, had faith in lucky days; Laud believed in omens and recorded his dreams. In those days, astrology shared with alchemy and magic the favour of the common people and the patronage of the great.

Chamberlen owed his continued liberty, not only to his social position and intellectual attainments, but also to the consideration that was accorded to those who combined the practice of medicine with the pursuit of Judiciary Astrology. Thus it was that Dr. Peter realized an immunity from persecution such as was not enjoyed by his neighbours in Nonconformist circles, even though they made far less noise and commotion.

Sabbatarian Pioneer.

Coming of an inventive family, the Doctor had the parts of a scholar and the instincts of a man of genius. Above all, he was a man of progressive ideas, in some respects two hundred years ahead of his time. When, however, as in his pamphlet addressed to the Jews, he claims to be "the first" to keep the Sabbath in the sense contended for by the Seventh-Day Baptists, he must speak from limited knowledge or with a merely local intention; for it appears that there were in other places Sabbath-keepers of whom apparently Dr. Peter knew nothing. For instance, Theophilus Brabourne, a Puritan minister in Norfolk,[18] wrote a book on the subject in 1628; and other Christian people had declared for a Jewish rigidity in the observance of the first day of the week, Sunday, among them Dr. Nicholas Bound, a Suffolk clergyman,,[19] who in 1595, wrote to that effect. Though in these circumstances, we cannot declare Dr. Peter to have been the first Sabbatarian, yet we may certainly set him down as among the pioneers. The briefest outline of the development of the community in modern history may be given in the words of "a leading member of the denomination":—

> The Reformation introduced a new era. In the sixteenth century Baptists who kept the seventh day were quite common in Germany. In the beginning of the seventeenth century they made their appearance in England, but did not begin to organize churches until 1650. Within fifty years from the latter date, there were eleven Sabbatarian churches in England, and scattered Sabbath-keepers in many parts of the Kingdom.[20]

In addition to this, we have the claim of the present-day

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[18] Or Bradbourn: See Brook's "Lives of the Puritans," vol. 2, p. 362 ff.

[19] Or Bownde: Op. cit., vol. 2, p. 171 ff.

[20] Cathcart's "Baptist Encyclopaedia," Revised Edition, Philadelphia, 1883. s. v. "Seventh-Day Baptists."

leaders of the denomination—a claim which it is no part of our immediate purpose to investigate—that as early as the year 1618, John Trask was writing and speaking on the subject, that, at length, he was placed in the pillory, whipped to gaol, and (with his wife) suffered years of imprisonment, for being a Sabbatarian; and it is also held that the present Mill Yard Church grew out of Trask's labours.[21]

Dr. Chamberlen is described on his tombstone as "A Christian keeping the Commandments of God and Faith of Jesus." It is evident that this formula has a confessional value. "The Commandments of God" clearly refers to the Old Testament institutions for which the denomination claimed to show an uncompromising respect; and "the Faith of Jesus" was regarded as referring to the New Testament ordinance of Baptism. It appears that "from time immemorial" the motto of Mill Yard Church—a church which, as we have seen, claims Dr. Chamberlen for one of its early pastors—has been: "Here are they that keep the Commandments of God and the Faith of Jesus"—Rev. xiv. 12. In the mottoes of other churches of the community there is a combination of "Commandments" and "Testimonies" to a like effect. Accordingly, in England, when Seventh-Day Baptists write to one another, they conclude their letters—"In the Commandments of God and the Faith of Jesus, Yours fraternally," etc. Hence Dr. Peter's son Hope, when putting up the tombstone, was careful to express in fitting terms the denominational relations which his father cherished so warmly.

Glimpses of the Inner Life.

What with professional duties and aims of a socio-political order, Dr. Peter was a man with a full career. When we add to such demands, the controversial interests which he espoused, combined with church life and pastoral obligations, we are compelled to imagine one who "scorned delights and lived laborious days." He was conscientious in the extreme: not hindered by inconvenience, not daunted by opposition. He was not the man to fight shy of causes that were despised, nor did he hesitate to adopt an attitude which might bring disadvantage and difficulty. In his own words, he had a life "according to the world" in his profession, but he also had a life "according to grace" in that he was "a servant of the Word of God." He reminds us of

[21] The Records of the Jacob-Lathorp-Jessey Church (1616-1641) have an important bearing upon this point. See "Transactions," vol. I. p. 222, footnote.

Daniel, or one of the other children of Judah, serving Jehovah while at the court of Babylon; he followed in the steps of those New Testament "saints that were of Cæsar's household."

In the turmoil of his life, with many interests and movements, we look, and almost in vain, for a quiet and restful note. We find it notwithstanding, in the warm testimony of Thomas Tillam, borne when our subject was in the full vigour of manhood. Writing from Coleman Street, these are Tillam's words:—

> Having found many congregations in the practice of the ordinances I wanted, I was, by a blessed hand, guided to my most heavenly brother, Dr. Chamberlen, one of the most humble, mortified souls (for a man of parts) that ever I yet met with, in whose sweet society I enjoyed the blessing of my God, by the laying on of their hands. And after a love-feast, having washed one another's feet, we did joyfully break bread, and concluded with a hymn: in all which the singular majesty of Christ shined forth, to the mighty conviction of some choice spectators.[22]

This testimony gives us a glimpse of the Doctor in the freedom of the society which he most loved, and enables us to see him at perfect ease among the people of his choice. Again we find the restful note, with some evidence of the profound comfort which entered into his toilsome life, in the lines of the epitaph which the weary old man wrote for his tombstone, and which appear on the south side of the vault, to the following effect:—

> Death my last sleep, to ease my careful head,
> The grave my hardest, but my easiest bed,
> The end of sorrow, labour and of care,
> The end of trouble, sickness, and of fear.
> Here I shall sin no more, no more shall weep,
> Here's only to be found a quiet sleep.
> Death's but one night, my life hath many seen,
> My life brought death, death brings me life again.
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> . . . . . .
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> Hence spring my joys and comforts evermore,
> I cannot feel but what Christ felt before.
> We now believe, and hear, and talk by guess,
> Then I shall see, and what I see possess.
> And when I wake, wrapt in eternal light
> Of God and Christ, I know no more of night.[23]

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[22] For references, see footnote No. 9, above.

[23] See the complete inscription in frontispiece.

These lines are a window through which we can look into the man's life as it actually was, occupied with Christian love and service. We may perhaps detect, in the epitaph as a whole, some peculiar "views" and opinions; but it is more to the point to regard the lines as an interpretation of the warm spiritual feelings and lively hopes of their author. If, further, we desiderate a simple statement of Dr. Peter's denominational standing and profession—bold and consistent during a long period of years—then we find that also on the tombstone in the words of his dutiful son Hope, as given on the north side:—

"As for his religion, he was a Christian, keeping the Commandments of God and Faith of Jesus, being baptized about the year 1648, and keeping the seventh day for the Sabbath above thirty-two years."

WORKS CONSULTED, etc.:—"The Chamberlens and the Midwifery Forceps" by J. H. Aveling, M.D.; the general facts of which have been accepted without question; "Dictionary of National Biography"; Hanserd Knollys Library, vols. on "Confessions" and "Fenstanton and Hexham Records"; David Douglas's "History of Baptist Churches in the North of England"; Walter Wilson's "Dissenting Churches and Meeting-houses in London"; Brook's "Lives of the Puritans"; Calamy's "Nonconformist's Memorial"; Dr. Cathcart's "Baptist Encyclopaedia"; Pike's "Ancient Meeting Houses"; seventeenth century pamphlets in the British Museum and Dr. Williams's Library; copies of "The Sabbath Observer" magazine for 1907; communications from Rev. Dr. Whitley, Editor of "Transactions" of B.H.S.; Rev. Dr. Boothe Colwell Davis, President of Alfred University, New York; Professor Corliss Fitz Randolph, Ph.D., of Newark, New Jersey; and from Lieut.-Col. T. W. Richardson, of Wood Green N., present pastor of Mill Yard Seventh-Day Baptist Church. On the subject of astrology and related practices—Articles in the Encyclopædias and other Works of Reference. The statements on the tombstone have been accepted without question, with the exception of the astronomical sign preceding the date of birth, on which see frontispiece reproduction, with Note there. Photographs by H. M. Appleyard, of Woodham Mortimer, permission to take pictures ot the tombstone being kindly given by the Rev. W. H. Poland, rector of the parish.

J. W. THIRTLE.